

LATERALLY EXTENDABLE BUMPER SYSTEM

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates to bumper systems for vehicles and, more particularly, to extendable bumper systems for motor vehicles.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Motor vehicles typically have a bumper structure supported on a body of the motor vehicle by energy absorbers that convert into work a portion of the kinetic energy of a force on the bumper structure. Such bumper energy absorbers may include relatively movable structural elements attached to the body and the bumper structure and a resistance medium between the structural elements.

[0003] Extendable bumper systems may include an actuator forming part of the bumper energy absorber for extending and retracting the bumper structure. Typically, these systems support the bumper structure close to the body of the motor vehicle during certain conditions, such as when the vehicle is being parked, and extend the bumper structure from the body during other conditions to increase the ability of the bumper energy absorbers to convert the kinetic energy of a force on the bumper structure into work.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0004] The disclosed apparatus relates to an extendable bumper system for a vehicle, the extendable bumper system comprising: a bumper structure; a laterally extending bumper segment slideably located within the bumper structure; and an actuator in operable communication between the bumper structure and the laterally extending bumper segment.

[0005] The disclosed apparatus also relates to an extendable bumper system for a modular vehicle, the extendable bumper system comprising: a bumper structure

located on a moveable platform; a laterally extending bumper segment slideably located within the bumper structure; and a lateral bumper rail located on a body pod and configured to receive the laterally extending bumper segment.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0006] Referring to the exemplary drawings wherein like elements are numbered alike in the several Figures:

[0007] Figure 1 is a schematic view of a vehicle with two laterally extendable bumper systems in a retracted position;

[0008] Figure 2 is a schematic view of the vehicle from Figure 1, with the two laterally extendable bumper systems in an extended position;

[0009] Figure 3 is a schematic view of a vehicle with two laterally and longitudinally extendable bumper systems in a retracted position;

[0010] Figure 4 is a schematic view of the vehicle from Figure 3, with the two laterally and longitudinally extendable bumper systems in an extended position;

[0011] Figure 5 is a schematic view of a modular vehicle with two laterally extendable bumper systems in a retracted position; and

[0012] Figure 6 is a schematic view of a modular vehicle with two laterally extendable bumper systems in an extended position.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0013] Referring to Figure 1, a schematic of a portion of a motor vehicle 10 with a front extendable bumper 14 and a rear extendable bumper 18 is shown. The front extendable bumper 14 is shown with laterally extending bumper segments 22 in a retracted state within the bumper 14. Similarly, the rear extendable bumper 18 is shown with laterally extending bumper segments 26 in a retracted state within the bumper 18. In this embodiment, there may be at least one actuator 28 configured to extend the laterally extending bumper segments 22, 26 into the extended position

configuration shown in Figure 2 via an actuator rod 27. In an embodiment, the actuator 28 may be a motor actuator, hydraulic actuator, or pyrotechnic actuator, or a combination thereof. For example, a pyrotechnic actuator may be used in situations for rapid irreversible expansion when an event, such as an impact, is imminent, and a motor or hydraulic actuator in those situations where the actuator is speed activated. The actuator 28 may be configured to extend the laterally extending bumper segments 22, 26 into the position shown in Figure 2. The actuator 28 may be in operable communication with a sensor 29. Although in Figures 1-4, the sensor 29 is shown in the center of the vehicle, the sensor may be located anywhere on the vehicle, including the perimeter of the vehicle. The sensor may be configured to determine when an impact is about to occur, in which case the sensor 29 may trigger the actuator 28 to actuate and extend the laterally extending bumper segments 22, 26. In another embodiment, the sensor 29 may be configured to detect the speed of the motor vehicle 10, and trigger the actuator 28 to actuate at a certain speed threshold, and to de-actuate when the vehicle returns to a speed below the speed threshold. A locking mechanism may also be incorporated into the front and rear extendable bumpers 14, 18 which would lock the laterally extending bumper segments 22, 26 into the extended position during an impact, or the locking mechanism may be configured to provide energy absorption during an impact. Actuators, sensors, and locking mechanisms may be used for longitudinally extending bumpers. One example of a locking mechanism is a ratchet mechanism.

[0014] Referring now to Figure 2, the front extendable bumper 14 is shown with laterally extending bumper segments 22 in an extended configuration. Similarly the rear extendable bumper 18 is shown with laterally extending bumper segments 26 in an extended configuration.

[0015] Another embodiment of the disclosed apparatus is shown in Figures 3 and 4. Referring to Figure 3, a schematic of a portion of a motor vehicle 10 with a front extendable bumper 14 and a rear extendable bumper 18 is shown. Like the embodiment shown in Figure 1, the front bumper 14 and rear bumper 18 are shown with their laterally extending bumper segments 22, 26 in a retracted state. However, in addition, the front and rear bumpers 14, 18 are able to extend longitudinally via the

longitudinal bumper rails 30, 34 located on the motor vehicle 10 wherein longitudinally extending bumper segments 38, 42 are located in a retracted state. In this embodiment, there may be at least one longitudinal actuator 31 configured to extend the longitudinally extending bumper segments 38, 42 into the extended position configuration shown in Figure 4 via a longitudinal actuator rod 32. The longitudinal actuator 31 may be motor actuator, hydraulic actuator, or pyrotechnic actuator, any of which may be configured to extend the longitudinally extending bumper segments 38, 42 into the position shown in Figure 4. The longitudinal actuator 31 may be in operable communication with a sensor 29. The sensor may be configured to determine when an impact is about to occur, in which case the sensor 29 may trigger the actuators 28, 31 to actuate and extend one or more of the extending bumper segments 22, 26, 38, 42. In another embodiment, the sensor 29 may be configured to detect the speed of the motor vehicle 10, and trigger the actuators 28, 31 to actuate at a certain speed threshold, and to de-actuate when the vehicle returns to a speed below the speed threshold. One or more locking mechanisms may also be incorporated into the front and rear extendable bumpers 14, 18 which would lock both the laterally and longitudinally extending bumper segments 22, 26, 38, 42 into the extended position during an event, such as an impact, or the locking mechanisms may be configured to provide energy absorption during an impact on the extendable bumpers 14, 18. Now, referring to Figure 4, the front extendable bumper is shown with not only the laterally extending bumper segments 22 in an extended configuration, but with also the longitudinally extending bumper segments 38 in an extended configuration. Likewise, the rear extendable bumper 18 is shown with laterally extending bumper segments 26 in an extended configuration and the longitudinally extending bumper segments 42 in an extended configuration.

[0016] The extendable bumper systems may also be useful for use in modular motor vehicles. Some modular vehicles may comprise a moveable platform, such a platform may be moveable via rolling, sliding, tracklaying, or hovering, and body pod, where the moveable platform has substantially all of the mechanical, electrical and structural componentry necessary for a fully functional vehicle, including at least an energy conversion system, a suspension and wheels, a steering system, and a

braking system, for example. The moveable platform may have a simplified interface with connection components to which body pods of substantially varying design may be attached. Body pods for these modular vehicles are adapted to conform to the attachment interface of the moveable platform. The body pods may use the connection by wire ("X-by-wire") technology to couple the body pod to the moveable platform and thus eliminate the necessity for mechanical control linkages. X-by-wire technology refers to electronic systems in vehicles which do not rely on conventional physical backups. The extendable bumpers may be used in such a modular motor vehicle to couple or assist in coupling a body pod to a moveable platform. Referring to Figure 5, a moveable platform 46 is shown. The moveable platform has a front extendable bumper 14 and a rear extendable bumper 18. The front bumper 14 is shown with laterally extending bumper segments 22 in a retracted state within the bumper 14. Similarly, the rear bumper 18 is shown with laterally extending bumper segments 26 in a retracted state within the bumper 18. Shown placed on the moveable platform is a body pod 50, which has not yet been coupled to the moveable platform 46. The body pod has a pair of front lateral bumper rails 54 and a pair of rear lateral bumper rails 58. Referring now to Figure 6, the laterally extending bumper segments 22 are shown in an extended state and within the front lateral bumper rails 54 of the body pod. Similarly the laterally extending bumper segments 26 are shown in an extended state and within the rear lateral bumper rails 58 of the body pod. Thus, using the extendable bumpers 14, 18 in a modular motor vehicle allows one to couple the body pod 50 to the moveable platform 46 when the laterally extending bumper segments 22, 26 are extended into the lateral bumper rails 54, 58, and in so doing to also form a continuous bumper across the front of the vehicle. Actuators 28 are shown in Figures 5 and 6, however, the extendable bumpers may be configured for manual extension of the bumper segments 22, 26, likewise also forming a continuous bumper across the rear of the vehicle. The extending bumper segments 22, 26 may also be withdrawn to uncouple the body pod 50 from the moveable platform.

[0017] The extendable bumper system described herein employs laterally extendable bumpers. These bumper systems may provide energy absorption for side

and near side impacts. These bumper systems may also provide a means for coupling a body pod to a moveable platform in modular vehicles.

[0018] While the invention has been described with reference to a preferred embodiment, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes may be made and equivalents may be substituted for elements thereof without departing from the scope of the invention. In addition, many modifications may be made to adapt a particular situation or material to the teachings of the invention without departing from the essential scope thereof. Therefore, it is intended that the invention not be limited to the particular embodiment disclosed as the best mode contemplated for carrying out this invention, but that the invention will include all embodiments falling within the scope of the appended claims.